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SUBJECT: NEW CPI COMMISSIONER FAVORS TRANSPARENCY AND TERM LIMITS
OVER SENSATIONALISM AND PUBLICITY

¶1. (SBU) Summary and introduction: Days after his appointment as the head of the Commission on Public Integrity (CPI), Judge Raheem Al-Ugaili sounded consistent themes in interviews with local media and meetings with emboffs. Speaking frankly of the danger public corruption poses to Iraqi society, Judge Raheem called for a long-term strategy to combat this "cancer." He spoke of the need for financial transparency throughout the public sector, adding a populist note by calling on parliamentarians to publicly declare all sources of income and decrying the disparity in compensation between elected officials and public servants. In private discussions with emboffs, Raheem stressed the importance of maintaining CPI's independence. He expressed gratitude for USG assistance to CPI and asked for the Embassy's continued support. Judge Raheem does not foresee initiating an immediate housecleaning of CPI staff...with the exception of former acting-Commissioner Musa Faraj. End summary and introduction.

Changing of the Guard

¶2. (U) In meetings with emboffs on January 20 and 22, Judge Raheem received emboffs with credentials in hand, presenting a copy of the signed order from the Secretariat of the Council of Ministers (COM SEC) appointing him interim CPI Commissioner (effective January 17, 2008) and forwarding his name forward to the Council of Representatives (COR) as the new official head of the Commission. Under CPA Order 55, Judge Raheem will serve a five year term if ratified by the COR. (Note: Post does not yet have a sense of when the COR will vote to ratify Judge Raheem's appointment. End note.)

¶3. (SBU) This same COM SEC order dismissed Musa Faraj as acting CPI Commissioner. According to Deputy CPI Commissioner Sami Shabek, Musa Faraj will officially remain on CPI's books on administrative leave for the next 30 days. Judge Raheem told emboffs bluntly that Faraj will not be returning to CPI; criticizing Faraj's poor management skills and general unfitness for leadership, Raheem said firmly "I will not work with him." (Note: In a January 21 interview with Baghdad Radio, Faraj blamed the U.S. for his dismissal from CPI, claiming that he had been fired in an effort to cover-up his own corruption investigations. End note.)

The Work at Hand

¶4. (SBU) Judge Raheem, who served as deputy CPI Commissioner in 2004-05, stressed the need to build a culture of professionalism at CPI. He described a deficit of leadership through the agency and stressed the importance of building institutional resiliency so that CPI "is not dependent on one man." While quick to note that many

CPI staff lack strong qualifications for their positions, Judge Raheem does not want to further damage agency morale by ordering mass dismissals. Instead, he said that he will keep the current staff, but with the proviso that job performance will be monitored. Personnel who do not perform over time will face the consequences. Eschewing micromanagement, Raheem spoke of empowering CPI staff by providing the training and technology necessary to conduct quiet, professional investigations. Saying that he wishes to lower the profile of CPI investigations and avoid the sensationalist appearance of political bias in order to build public confidence for the agency, Judge Raheem requested strong USG support for his efforts to develop CPI's capacity.

15. (SBU) In his press interviews, Judge Raheem minced no words about the challenge before CPI, saying that political will to address corruption remains weak. He then called for a series of actions to enhance public sector transparency, such as requiring government agencies to account for the management of public funds and adequate wages for civil servants to inoculate against bribery. With emboffs, he spoke of his admiration for fixed terms of office, a practice Iraq should adopt to break the Ba'athist practice of allowing incumbents to hold lucrative offices for decades.

A Respected Choice

16. (U) Post has heard only positive reaction to Judge Raheem's appointment to CPI. The Chairman of the COR Anti-Corruption Committee Sheik al-Sa'adi described Judge Raheem as a "first rate son of Iraq" whose patriotism and dedication will help guide the GOI its struggle to replace corruption with honesty. Dr. Adel Mohsen, the Prime Minister's Anti-Corruption Advisor and member of the Joint Anti-Corruption Committee, observed that Judge Rahim was honest and

fair and predicted that his appointment would improve relations between the ministerial Inspectors General and CPI. 'Atifa 'AbdulQadir al-'Ubaydi, the Director General of the Judicial Training Institute, lamented Judge Raheem's departure from her faculty, but lauded him as the right man to tackle public corruption. DOJ/ICITAP advisors report a marked uptick in morale among CPI staff since the announcement of Judge Raheem's appointment. Judge Raheem has impressed Embassy and PRT staff familiar with his work at CPI, JTI and Baghdad's Karada trial court as a smart, serious and dedicated judge and administrator not known to mix politics with legal matters.

Comment

17. (SBU) The COM's appointment of a respected jurist to lead CPI is a strong step polishing the image of an agency tarnished by cross-accusations of mismanagement, malfeasance and political mischief following the dramatic departure of former Commissioner Radhi al-Radhi in September 2007. Although acting Commissioner Musa Faraj had demonstrated some growth once in office in recent months - for example, becoming a surprisingly feisty advocate of CPI's independence - his political baggage and erratic leadership seriously retarded the agency's development. In contrast, Judge Raheem's public and private remarks since his appointment reflect serious analysis of Iraq's vulnerability to corruption and offered reasoned strategies to boost society's immunity.

18. (SBU) As part of the Embassy's 2008 anti-corruption initiative, post will evaluate USG support for CPI to date and will determine how U.S. engagement should continue.

Bio Notes

19. (SBU) According to his C.V., Judge Raheem Hassan al-Ugaili was born in Baghdad in 1966. He graduated with a law degree from Baghdad University in 1991 and worked as a lawyer for the next four years. He began judicial training in 1995 and was given his first judicial appointment in 1997. He served as a trial judge between

1999 and 2004. He served with the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministries from August 2004 until April 2005, and with CPI as a commissioner from October - November 2004 and as deputy commissioner from April - November 2005. Judge Raheem returned to work as a trial judge in Baghdad from September 2005 until his January 2008 appointment to CPI. During the same period, he lectured at the Judicial Training Institute and published four major legal books. Although his C.V. lists Arabic as his only language, Raheem's reactions in meetings with emboffs revealed a limited understanding of English.

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